Note from the
League of European
Research Universities

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Good Practice in Communicating Animal Research at Universities

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Summary

Animal research has contributed to many of the medical advances we now take for granted. We have probably all benefited from vaccines and antibiotics to prevent and treat infections, and anaesthetics used in all forms of surgery. Medicines can now overcome serious conditions such as diabetes, asthma, and high blood pressure. Medicines and vaccines for pets and livestock rely just as much on animal research as human medicines. In addition, the majority of the medicines that vets prescribe are actually derived from those used in humans.

Whilst enormous strides have been made in the development of different models and technologies to replace animals, it is clear that the use of animals will need to be maintained for the foreseeable future as part of a range of complementary approaches to be used in scientific research.

The general public's opinion is divided on the use of animals in research. In part, this could be due to a lack of openness and transparency about why and how animals are used in research, and a lack of awareness of the stringent rules and regulations under which such experiments are performed. Universities (as well as other research players) could be more vocal about the benefits which animal use brings to both basic and applied research.

In this short note, LERU outlines several actions which could improve transparency and communications on animal use in universities. LERU recommends that universities:

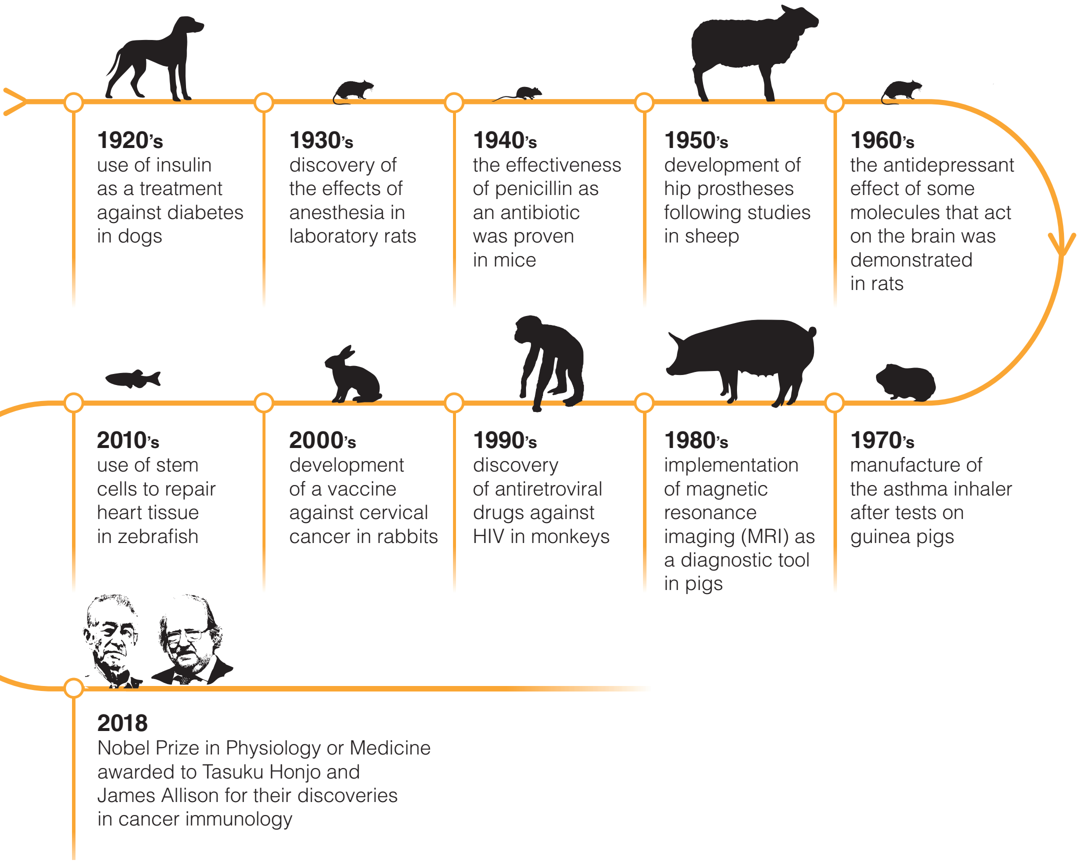
- Establish an animal experiments communication group, comprised of experts with different backgrounds with respect to animal experimentation and communications;
- Develop an internal and an external communication plan. Guidelines for dealing with journalists, social media, active community outreach, politicians and regulators, NGOs opposed to animal research and professional stakeholders (industry, funders, hospitals etc.) should be developed;

- Outline 4-5 key messages which are regularly and actively communicated to all target audiences and via all communication channels, based on evidence and not just vague statements;
- Develop an easily accessible section of the university website on animal experimentation, including a position statement, FAQs page, case studies why animals were/are used in specific research issues, high quality images and videos;
- Encourage public outreach events and site visits where appropriate;
- Develop a strategy to act on campaigns/protests against animal experimentation and crisis communication.

The note gives several examples of good practice in developing a animal research webpages both from within and outside of LERU, including sophisticated virtual tour examples. It also outlines various associations and bodies that can give further specialised advice on how to develop an effective communications policy with regard to animal research, both on the European and national levels.

Introduction

Throughout history, animal research has been crucial to many scientific breakthroughs and has provided indispensable information to researchers, doctors and vets regarding living organisms, understanding diseases and discovering new treatments for humans and animals[1].



1920's
use of insulin as a treatment against diabetes in dogs

1930's
discovery of the effects of anesthesia in laboratory rats

1940's
the effectiveness of penicillin as an antibiotic was proven in mice

1950's
development of hip prostheses following studies in sheep

1960's
the antidepressant effect of some molecules that act on the brain was demonstrated in rats

1970's
manufacture of the asthma inhaler after tests on guinea pigs

1980's
implementation of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) as a diagnostic tool in pigs

1990's
discovery of antiretroviral drugs against HIV in monkeys

2000's
development of a vaccine against cervical cancer in rabbits

2010's
use of stem cells to repair heart tissue in zebrafish

2018
Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine awarded to Tasuku Honjo and James Allison for their discoveries in cancer immunology

[1] http://www.animalresearch.info/en/medical-advances/nobel-prizes/

Directive 2010/63/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 September 2010 on the Protection of Animals used for Scientific Purposes[2] (2010/63/EC) "*seeks to facilitate and promote the advancement of alternative approaches*" and to facilitate the "*final goal of full replacement of procedures on live animals for scientific and educational purposes as soon as it is scientifically possible to do so.*" It is clear however, despite the enormous strides that have been made in the development of different models and technologies[3] for replacing animals, their use will need to be maintained for the foreseeable future as part of a range of complementary approaches to be used in scientific research.

Public opinion is divided on the use of animals in all types of research even where there is no alternative. About two thirds of the public can accept the use of animals for medical research where there is no alternative but less than half accepts it for any type of research[4]. This could be attributed in part to the activities of, and selective information from animal welfare and anti-vivisection activists leading to concerns over animal welfare[5], and partly because the relationship between animal experiments and human health is not always understood by the public at large.

Although many universities are still hesitant towards openness and transparency on animal experiments, others, either voluntarily, or forced by circumstances, have experienced the advantages that openness and transparency can bring.

This short note proposes several activities to improve transparency and communication about animal experiments within universities. LERU recommends that a group of experts should be established, with different backgrounds with respect to animal experiments and communication skills. The establishment of such an "Animal Experiments Communication Group" has shown to be crucial for appropriate communication in different situations[6]. Several activities focussed on different communication strategies are discussed in this note. It is crucial in all of these activities that each university develops a clear policy on animal experimentation, which is also shared outside of the university.

A well-designed strategy should be the basis for effective and proactive communication to different groups under different situations. Furthermore, dedicated webpages providing information on a university's policy with regard to animal experiments, as well as specific information on animal experiments (including annual statistics), will lead to improved openness and transparency.

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[2] http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2010/63/oj

[3] Balls M, Combes R, Worth A. The history of alternative test methods in toxicology (History of toxicology and environmental health. Cambridge (MA): Academic Press; 2018

[4] Ipsos UK (2016) https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/publication/1970-01/sri-public-attitudes-to-animal-research-2016.pdf

[5] Note that the EC Directive 2010/63/EC seeks to ensure '*a high level of protection for animals that still need to be used in procedures*'. Europe has stringent rules for animal experimentation, and animal experiments can only be done if no alternatives can be found.

[6] MacArthur Clark J, Clifford P, Jarrett W, Pekow C. Communicating About Animal Research with the Public. *ILAR J*. 2019;60(1):34-42.

The Importance of Communication and Transparency in Animal Research

Animal research remains a deeply controversial topic for the general public. This is hardly surprising as the public is often only informed about this topic by "anti-vivisection" and animal welfare organisations, giving a biased and incomplete view of animal experimental practices. On the other hand, the reasons for doing animal-based experiments are not defended with the same level of fervour by the biomedical sector. Proactive and transparent communication by universities carrying out biomedical research about why and how animal experiments are currently performed, including the ethical considerations needed before experiments are conducted and how suffering is minimised, could help the public to better understand and trust basic or applied research, especially biomedical research.

The aim of this brief note is to help communication, research and management professionals within universities to develop a strategy for communications concerning the use of animals in basic and applied research, especially biomedical research, and to highlight organisations which can provide further help. The goal is to design key messages, establish communication strategies, identify the internal experts to handle crises and to share good communication schemes and best practice examples between different universities. This, in turn, will generate a long-term and proactive communication strategy and support confidence and trust in the life science sector.

How Does the Public Feel About Animal Research?

The 2010 Eurobarometer poll on Science and Technology[7] showed that European citizens' opinion of the necessity of using animals in research is fairly divided. On this question, 44% of respondents at the EU27 level are in agreement and 37% of respondents are in disagreement. This is, in large part, caused by an imbalance in the information about animal research: the scientific community has failed to convince the public about the importance of animal research and the strict conditions under which these are allowed, whilst various associations that oppose animal research have gained ground in Europe, influencing not only public opinion but also, in some cases, the opinion of decision makers.

In another public opinion poll, the animal research sector has been perceived to be "secretive" about its work[8]. The failure to publish information on animal research can indeed leave a university open to this accusation. When such "secrets" have been exposed, experience shows how activists have been given the opportunity to inflict considerable reputational damage on researchers, institutions and the biomedical sector.

At European level, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) "Stop Vivisection" was able to influence discussions about animal research in quite a one-sided manner. The European Commission's communication response[9] to the ECI in 2015 made a clear call for all institutes and universities to provide more information and commit to better justification for animal research to the public.

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[7] Special Eurobarometer 340 (2010) https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_340_en.pdf

[8] IPSOS survey UK (2018) https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/public-attitudes-animal-research-2018

[9] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/lab_animals/pdf/vivisection/en.pdf

Over the years, the scientific community has started to realise the reservations from the public towards animal experiments. Communication with the public on the importance of animal research, and the carefulness with which it is practiced, is an important way of increasing understanding and awareness of the importance of this work to the biomedical sector. It can also demonstrate how the 3Rs (Reduce, Replace, Refine)[10], the importance of ethical approval, and other initiatives are being implemented within an institution[11]. A proactive and transparent communication strategy also puts animal research in context, as a necessary part of basic and clinical research with benefits to both humans and animals.

Perhaps the messages we communicate need to be clearer: animal experiments are done where there are no other alternatives available. In fundamental or basic research, experiments on animals help to advance knowledge of biological systems and thus to better understand the diseases studied by clinical research. Without basic research discoveries, human and animal medicine would simply not have progressed. Animal experiments also reduce the risk to people taking part in trials, speed up the innovation process, bringing much needed drugs to market more quickly. In a world where pandemics, and new emerging diseases are becoming more frequent, we need all the tools we can (including animal research) to fight back[12]. Although animal experimentation is not favoured by everyone, it is an invaluable part of basic and biomedical research. Universities need to explain this more clearly. By being open and honest, universities can help address public perception of the importance and usefulness of animal experimentation.

How Does Directive 2010/63/EU Influence University Communication Activities?

In November 2017, the review of Directive 2010/63/EU introduced a number of elements aiming to improve transparency[13]. For example, the majority of Member States and users were of the opinion that the requirements in the Directive for publication of non-technical project summaries and annual statistical data of the research using animals have positively contributed to transparency, although their full impact has yet to be realised. Transparency is essential to develop trust that the stipulations and conventions in the care and use of animals are obeyed in science. This is also the basis for public support of continued research using animals, until such time (in the far future from today's perspective) their use can be replaced by non-animal alternatives.

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[10] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/lab_animals/3r/alternative_en.htm
https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/the-3rs#The%203Rs%20definitions
Reduction refers to methods that minimize the number of animals used per experiment or study consistent with the scientific aims. It is essential for reduction that studies with animals are appropriately designed and analysed to ensure robust and reproducible findings. Replacement refers to technologies or approaches, which directly replace or avoid the use of animals in experiments where they would otherwise have been used. Refinement refers to methods that minimize the pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm that may be experienced by research animals, and which improve their welfare.

[11] Initiatives such as: the PREPARE guidelines on how to plan animal experiments, and the ARRIVE guidelines to improve reporting data from animal experiments, as well as more attention to experimental design and systematic reviews, are designed to deliver more reliable and translatable research. In addition, these exercises may lead to a reduction of unnecessary animal experiments.

[12] https://mrc.ukri.org/research/research-involving-animals/impact-of-animal-research-in-the-covid-19-response/

[13] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0631

What are Universities and Other Research Institutions Doing?

Initiatives such as The Concordat on Animal Research in the UK, Spain, Portugal and Belgium[14], have been ratified by a number of institutions. In 2019, the French universities, public, private research institutes and other stakeholders also started a process of developing a transparency agreement.

A proactive communication policy and transparency concerning animal research can provide support to gain credibility and acceptance for animal research from the general public. The Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK was launched in 2014. The large number of Concordat signatories (currently 125 signatories[15]) ensures that working on openness of animal research in the UK is seen as the norm rather than exception. More recently, Swiss universities, academies and other stakeholders have started a process of developing a transparency agreement and formed a Universities Communication Group in order to improve and coordinate an active and transparent communication to prepare for the 2022 popular vote on the ban of animal and human research. In 2018, the Swiss Universities Conference of Public Relations and Information Officers (SUPRIO) developed a document titled 'Good Practice in animal experimentation communication' [16]. The recommendations in this note are loosely based upon those found within the SUPRIO document.

How to Develop an Effective Communication Strategy on Animal Research

Section 1: Define Communication Plans

1. **Develop an Internal Communication Plan**

   Successful communication about animal experiments must be based on experienced, trustworthy people, who are trained in communication and know the animal research field as well as any related concerns. They should be able to put their case in a very simple, easy to understand way to balance opposing arguments. Implementing a designated Animal Research Communication Group (ARCG) would be ideal for developing and implementing communication strategies within a university.

   The ARCG would be preferably composed of:

   - A named responsible group leader;
   - The media officers or communication department;

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[14] http://concordatopenness.org.uk/about-the-concordat-on-openness
LERU universities signees: University of Cambridge; University of Oxford; Imperial College London; University College London; University of Edinburgh
https://www.eara.eu/post/transparency-agreement-on-animal-research-in-portugal-1
https://www.eara.eu/post/transparency-agreement-on-animal-research-launched-in-spain
LERU university signee: Universitat de Barcelona
https://www.eara.eu/post/belgian-researchers-commit-to-transparency-agreement-on-animal-research
LERU university signee : KU Leuven

[15] http://concordatopenness.org.uk/

[16] This was an internal document for the use of Swiss Universities.

- The university management staff (e.g. for political and/or superior topics);
- Researchers who work with animal models and with alternative methods;
- The animal welfare officer;
- The animal facility managers.

The ARCG should meet at regular intervals to discuss the strategy and progress of animal research communication and to develop crisis and response plans. Furthermore, it should have provisions in place that allow members of the group to be quickly informed about acute situations by using e-mail, SMS or a specific WhatsApp group. Having some communication materials reviewed by people who do not work in the animal or communications field (for example management staff or other university personnel), may be a useful way to check accessibility for different audiences.

It is also very important to inform staff not directly involved in animal research about the legislation that regulates animal research, scientific projects and procedures. Organising workshops, lectures and round-tables, using existing channels of communication (including the university's annual report for animal research and newsletters on biomedical research) are good ways to communicate animal research activities within the University context.

The process to develop an efficient communication strategy could be as follows:

- Identify a lead or a handful of contact persons for animal research issues (members of the Animal Research Communication Group): designated spokespersons or scientists able to talk about animal research from different standpoints (research using animals, ethics, animal welfare, alternative methods…);
- Consider if staff involved in animal research can handle queries themselves and decide when staff should not respond to a question. The staff should know where to go for information and what the policies are;
- Preferably before accepting any outside contact, inform the ARCG and discuss the appropriate communication strategy. All outside contacts should be preferably done by the dedicated spokesperson(s);
- Ensure that staff not directly involved in animal research knows what to do if asked about the subject by someone from the public or a journalist, for example through an easily accessible FAQ's page on the university intranet page;
- Ensure that all staff know what communication resources and support are available in the university;
- Ensure all departments that use animals in research are regularly updated with any news (any unexpected events, research findings, including case studies illustrating how and why you support the use of animals in research);
- Organise discussion meetings (on animal models, alternative methods, ethics, animal welfare, etc) between students and university experts (researchers, ethicists, animal welfare officers, etc.).

2. Develop an External Communication Plan

a). Develop Guidelines for Dealing with Journalists

We can identify active and reactive press contacts. Active press contacts include press releases to inform about situations that you would like to share with the community, whereas reactive press contacts are to respond to a request. In addition, external communication includes, e.g., invited interviews for newspaper, radio or television.

Universities should ideally mention, as much as possible in press releases, the use of animal experiments when they contributed to the results of a research, and specifying which animals were used. This helps to stress the link between scientific breakthroughs (biomedical, veterinary) and animal research.

Universities should ensure that media reports on animal experiments are as balanced and as fair as possible so they should invest time in briefing the journalist(s) thoroughly and demand the right to check/clear direct/indirect quotes, etc. In order to create as much transparency as possible, universities should define rules for visiting animal facilities and for producing images: what is possible, what is not and why not? (e.g., interview with project leader: yes, visiting facilities: no, because the animals get disturbed and the experiment gets influenced). These rules can be harmonised with other universities in a particular area/country.

Ideally, press contacts should be handled by the dedicated media spokesperson(s) in the ARCG who already have an established and trusted relationship with the journalist(s). This also ensures consistent messaging. If other people are invited for a press event, they should be well informed about what to communicate. These briefings should be by members of the ARCG who are aware of the institute's policy on animal experiments. The staff should understand that it is always possible to ask for a response time (of a few hours), during which the ARCG can be contacted for advice.

b). Social Media

When dealing with social media, there needs to be an effective dialogue regarding sensitive and controversial issues like animal experimentation. Strategies for Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram etc. should be defined by the respective universities. This should include when and how to engage in or avoid discussions, how to prevent/deal with crisis communication, etc. Having a dedicated person to follow activities on social media is recommended.

c). Active Community Outreach

Active community outreach is an important activity to inform the community about animal experiments. Universities could encourage scientists to give talks in schools, for associations, at public events, etc. The local research community should showcase how and why they use animals in their research and what the benefits are. Animal technicians often make a very positive impression on school children because they can talk about how they care for the animals themselves. More widely, scientists involved in animal experiments should discuss the various protections that exist to prevent unnecessary testing and harm to the animals.

d). Politicians and Regulators

Politicians (local, regional and national) could be very useful supporters when the media invites them for comments, or when discussions about animal experiments take place in parliament. Universities should provide general information about research and its benefits, and, if possible, build a trusting relationship with the politicians themselves. Universities should make sure, by establishing personal contacts between politicians and the designated spokespersons or the university's lobbyist(s), that politicians know whom to contact for information on experimental animal topics.

e). Professional Stakeholders (Research Funders, Professional Associations, Industry Partners, Hospitals and others Research Institutes and Universities).

Some professional stakeholders such as The European Animal Research Association (EARA), and national level bodies, can offer support and guidance, and it is very important to discuss all openness measures with colleagues in other research institutes and universities. Research funders and patient associations may want to know about the research and its benefits, and the university's policies and practices when using animal models. It is very important to align communications within the university on these issues.

f). Non-Governmental Organisations Opposed to Animal Research.

Universities could start a dialogue with organisations that oppose animal experiments. Although it will never lead to an agreement, it will provide opportunities to communicate activities that lead to, for instance, improved animal welfare or reduce the number of animals used. It certainly helps to reduce aggressive actions due to a lack of transparency.

3. Define Key Messages

Universities should define four or five key messages that are communicated actively and regularly to all target audiences and via all communication channels. These should be able to be backed up by evidence in case of enquiries and not just vague statements. Examples to be adapted (depending on audience) include:

- Animal research has played a significant role in the progress of human and veterinary medicine (e.g. development of vaccination, exploration of AIDS and Parkinson's, development of chemotherapy, use of robotic arms controlled by neural signals);
- Animal research is still indispensable for biomedical research and medical progress;
- Animal research is fundamentally important for [city] as a science and research as well as medical location/centre;
- The European Union has one of the world's strictest legislation on animal experimentation. In international comparison, laboratory animals in the EU are particularly well protected;
- All animal research needs to be approved by the [official authority/commission]. The projects will only be approved if the programmes benefit for science and society is higher than the burden/harms on the animals, and if there is no alternative to animal experiments in order to gain the intended knowledge;
- [University] demands and promotes the implementation of the 3Rs principles, in order to replace animal experiments with alternative methods, to reduce the number of animals by accurate planning and appropriate experimental techniques, and to refine the experimental conditions (environment, pain management) and husbandry to minimise animal suffering and increase animal well-being.

More broadly it is recommended that the university should prepare rebuttals to the main arguments used by "anti-vivisectionists" and animal welfare organisations.

Section 2: Dedicate an Easily Accessible Section of the University Website to Explaining Animal Experimentation

By surveying the openness of 1,219 websites of biomedical research establishments across the EU, the conclusion of EARA is that the sector is still far away from an acceptable level of openness and transparency in animal research[17].

Institutional websites could be a great tool for informing the public, media, decision makers and regulators about the use of animals in research and the contribution of animal research to biomedical science. The websites can also demonstrate the importance of animal welfare to the life sciences and highlight the significance of the 3Rs.

The website of each university should include an area which provides the institutional policies (position statement) with regard to animal experiments: why does this institution perform animal experiments, under which conditions and what protections exist. Furthermore, information about animal experimentation could be shown, ideally linked to specific project examples.

The more relevant information that is provided on the institutional website, the easier it will be to respond to people's questions or for them to find the answers. The best animal research webpages, according to the EARA 2018 and 2020[17,18] include: a position statement, frequently asked questions (FAQs), the number of animals used, case studies, images and videos. Each of these are explained in more detail below.

1. Develop a Position Statement

Providing a statement on the institutional website shows that the institute is open about animal research. It tells research funders and the public why, when and how animals for basic, biomedical and veterinary research are used and is an opportunity to explain the high standards of animal welfare that this research must meet.

Universities should make sure that they have a clear online statement and put the statement on an easy-to-find page on the website. Remember, some people will search “animal experiments” or “animal testing”, as well as “animal research”.

A good animal research statement could include:

- Why the university supports animal research under certain conditions;
- Why animal research is sometimes necessary and its benefits;
- Why researchers have a responsible behaviour concerning animal experimentation.

Further information could include:

- The laws and the regulation (European and national levels);
- Ethical review policies;
- Annual statistics on the use of experimental animals, including an explanation of the figures;

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[17] EARA (2018) https://secal.es/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/EARA-study-of-EU-based-websites-report-2018.pdf

[18] EARA (2020) https://www.eara.eu/post/eu-biomedical-sector-still-at-an-unsatisfactory-level-of-openness-about-animal-research-eara-websi?lang=fr

- How animals are taken care of in the animal facilities;
- Explanation of the 3Rs principle and implementation;
- Awareness of the dilemmas that are involved in animal experimentation;
- Examples of breakthroughs made at the university and information on the role animals played.

2. **Develop a FAQs Page**

Answers to frequently asked questions can provide information not just about the use, but also about the limitations, of animal experiments. The FAQs can be useful for public and social media communication. The following FAQs are the most common:

- Why are animals used in research?
- Who uses animals in research?
- Is animal research necessary? How can results derived from animal research be extrapolated to humans?
- Has animal research contributed to human or veterinary medicine?
- What alternatives are there to using animals in research and testing?
- How is animal research regulated?
- What are the 3Rs in animal research?
- What animals are used in research? How many animals are used in research?
- Aren't the animals in laboratories suffering and in pain? What happens to animals once an experiment is completed?
- Why are increasing numbers of animals killed for research?
- Do we really have the right to experiment on animals? What about their rights?
- Are pets and non-human primates stolen for research?

3. **Give Case Studies**

A case study can help bring an issue to life with real-world examples. A case study can explain how and why animals were used in research and what this can help researchers find out. A case study can be like a short news story. A good case study may include:

- The basic research question and the discovery of new knowledge in biology;
- The basic research question/setup and the benefits for clinical research;
- The impact of the disease addressed (symptoms, number of people/animals affected, etc.);
- Why animals were necessary;
- What the research involved: keep it simple, with no long, technical words or acronyms, etc;
- Any specific steps taken by the researchers and technicians to reduce animal use or alleviate suffering;
- Information about the ethical review and how it is regulated;
- When and where the research happened. The more recent the better.

4. **Develop High-resolution Images and Videos**

Good, suitable, authentic visual material is crucial since we all are aware of the power of images. Each university should ideally build up a stock of professional pictures of the animal experimentation and the facilities at their institution, ideally also showing specific project examples. Most members of the public are unfamiliar with lab equipment. The images and videos are a powerful way of providing an accurate representation of the research environment within an institution.

5. **Encourage Public Events and Site Visits**

   Animal experimentation should be an integral part of existing exhibitions on science and technology, research and medicine. Animal experimentation has to be explicitly presented in easy to understand language.

   Site visits of animal accommodation/research laboratories using animals are a very effective way to show transparency to interested people. Such visits or guided tours (and/or video tour or live video) accompanied by researchers and animal welfare officers should be offered regularly to the stakeholders and the public. They allow reality to replace fantasy as seeing is often believing.

Section 3 – Develop a Strategy to Act on Campaigns/Protests Against Animal Experimentation and Crisis Communication.

To prepare a crisis communication strategy, it is very important to recognise the level of risk to the reputation of the university and to develop in advance a plan of action for each scenario. In general, inform the ARCG before communicating the university's position statement and the key messages of response, and contact your network and universities who have experienced similar situations.

1. **Campaigns Against Animal Research**

   Campaigns against universities and research institutes from parties opposing animal research are relatively rare at present. That said, in the last six years, a number of campaigns have been taken against research centres and universities across Europe: Max Planck Institute (2015), University of Milan (2013), University of Cambridge (2014), Imperial College (2013), Free University Brussels (VUB) (2016), Brain & Spine Institute Paris (2017), ETH and University of Zurich (monthly demonstrations in 2019-2020).

   Campaigns may involve different scenarios: a protest outside of the university (animal facility), targeted at companies and organisations with which the establishment may have links, a large volume of letters, online petitions or high-volume phone/mails that target individuals at a university, and even undercover infiltration.

   Often, journalists and activist organisations misrepresent the nature and purpose of scientific research involving animals, so it is very important to be prepared. How to respond will depend on time and resources. If a large number of identical stock letters are received, a standard response to all could be sent. But it is worth remembering that online petitions often auto-create emails by signatories and can result in thousands of mails being sent out. Some institutes choose to reply only to messages that have been personalised in some manner or to those from supporters. In all cases, it is a valuable opportunity to communicate with people who care about why you perform research using animals and to correct any misinformation.

   While it is not very common for anti-animal-research protests to target medical research institutes, it is possible, and it must be considered as legitimate way for individuals to express their opinion. Universities that have experienced this type of actions could share their experiences and discuss them with their colleagues both within their university and outside of it.

2. Infiltrations into Animal Units

The record of the number of attacks (material sabotage and other clandestine actions) indicates a change since 2007 that is less alarming than some publicised comments suggest. The downward trend may even be continuing, but this remains to be confirmed. On the other hand, the emergent forms of direct actions (infiltrations, intrusions, occupation of premises), inspired by civil disobedience, are very likely to develop both numerically and in terms of the diversity of targets and processes employed. Animal activist groups have set aside large amounts of money for “investigations.” The best defence, but also best reaction, against an infiltration, is to be as open as possible. It is worth noting that an infiltration can have a profound effect on staff wellbeing, morale and trust which may take some time to rebuild.

In April 2013, The Sunday Times newspaper featured an infiltration by the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (now Cruelty Free International), at Imperial College London. It claimed that staff breached welfare standards by mistreating laboratory animals. The quick and far-reaching response by Imperial College to the undercover film is a very good example of how an institution should respond to an “investigation” that (indeed) revealed the need for improvements in training. In 2015, the Imperial College film – Animal Research at Imperial College – was released to coincide with the publication of their first Animal Research Annual Report[19], both revealing the high-quality research and animal welfare at the Imperial College.

Finally, it is important to reflect and debrief all the actions after the crisis and assess how the ARCG, the staff and the researchers feel about the communication and the actions that were taken during the crisis. Such an activity can help identify areas for improvement, both with regards to transparency and communication before the event, and with regard to actions carried out during the event itself.

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[19] https://www.imperial.ac.uk/research-and-innovation/about-imperial-research/research-integrity/animal-research/annual-report/

Conclusion

A well-prepared communication plan, informative website and a proactive Animal Research Communication Group will lead to a better understanding by the general public and other stakeholders about the why and hows of animal research. Transparency and openness, instead of secrecy, have been shown to increase public trust in research involving animals, and to reduce unforeseen aggressiveness towards the institution. Regular exchange and discussion between universities, and between universities and different stakeholders could guide and facilitate communication activities in the different situations.

ANNEX 1: Examples of Websites

The following section gives some practical examples, both from within and outside LERU, of good practice in developing a website on animal research within a university/research institute. This is not a comprehensive list, but gives a flavour of what could be done.

1. University Websites Giving Information

- University of Cambridge
  https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/research-at-cambridge/animal-research
- University of Copenhagen
  https://transgenicmice.ku.dk
- University of Edinburgh
  https://www.ed.ac.uk/research/animal-research
- University of Geneva
  https://www.unige.ch/recherche/expanim/
- Imperial College
  https://www.imperial.ac.uk/research-and-innovation/about-imperial-research/research-integrity/animal-research/
- University of Milan
  https://www.unimi.it/en/university/governance-and-strategy/governance/animal-welfare-organisation
- University of Oxford
  https://www.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events/animal-research
  Utrecht University
  https://www.uu.nl/en/research/research-at-utrecht-university/quality-and-integrity/responsible-animal-testing
- University of Zurich
  https://www.uzh.ch/cmsssl/en/researchinnovation/ethics/animals.html

2. Sophisticated Web Examples

These web pages give virtual tours through different animal facilities, showing animal housing and facilities. In *lieu* of actual visits which may not be allowed because of the potential to influence a research experiment, these are a good way of getting a feel for what an animal facility looks like and give high quality, zoomable pictures, often with annotations to explain specific issues.

- 360° Laboratory animal tours, featuring the MRC Harwell Institute, The Pirbright Institute, University of Bristol and University of Oxford
  http://www.labanimaltour.org/

- Animal unit virtual tour, the University of Manchester’s animal unit
  https://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/environment/governance/ethics/animals/virtual-tour/
- Virtual tour through the primate husbandry of the German Primate Center (DPZ)
  https://www.dpz.eu/en/info-center/media-center/virtual-tours/virtual-tour.html
- CNRS Animal Facility virtual tour, France
  https://visite-animalerie.cnrs.fr/#/accueil/

ANNEX 2: Further Information

There are various associations and bodies who can give further advice on how to develop an effective communications policy with regard to communicating animal research. These include:

- European Commission
  https://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/lab_animals/related_topics_en.htm and
  https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=SWD:2017:353:REV1&from=EN
  (see section 3 on transparency)
- The European Animal Research Association (EARA):
  The European lobby for animal research with members across Europe and with expertise in transparency and communicating on animal research. EARA have played a major role in improving transparency and communication of animal research through developing transparency agreements with animal research organisations in different countries across Europe, and through informative events on how to improve transparency on this sensitive issue.
  https://www.eara.eu/
- Alliance of UK Science Organisations
  http://www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/
- Swiss Academy of Sciences SCNAT and Swiss Laboratory Animal Science Association (SGV)
  https://naturalsciences.ch/animal-experimentation-explained
- Swiss Association “Research for Life”
  https://www.research-life.ch/
- Alliance of German Science Organisations
  https://www.tierversuche-verstehen.de
- National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement & Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3R)
  https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/
- Dedicated webpage on the website of the Dutch Association of Universities
  https://vsnu.nl/gebruik-dierproeven.html
  https://vsnu.nl/en_GB/animal-testing
- Gircor (Groupe interprofessionnel de réflexion et de communication sur la recherche)
  https://www.recherche-animale.org/
- EFOR (Etudes Fonctionnelle sur les Organismes Modèles)
  The EFOR network was set up in order to identify the animal and plant species frequently used in fundamental, agronomic, environmental or biomedical research as well as the structures supporting the development of these study models in France.
  https://efor.fr

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LERU was founded in 2002 as an association of research-intensive universities sharing the values of high-quality teaching in an environment of internationally competitive research. The League is committed to: education through an awareness of the frontiers of human understanding; the creation of new knowledge through basic research, which is the ultimate source of innovation in society; the promotion of research across a broad front, which creates a unique capacity to reconfigure activities in response to new opportunities and problems. The purpose of the League is to advocate these values, to influence policy in Europe and to develop best practice through mutual exchange of experience.

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